



Congressional Record

Mr. Bishop (GA) – Madame Speaker, I rise today to honor Tommy Irvin an accomplished public servant and a personal friend. He is retiring after devoting over forty years to his state and country, serving as the Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture.

His 54-plus years of public service began in 1956, when he was elected to the Habersham County Board of Education. From there, he went on to serve as Chairman of the School Board and President of the Georgia School Boards Association. Throughout his time in public office, he has remained dedicated to educational advancement in the State of Georgia, and as such, he is an honorary Lifetime Member of the Parent-Teacher Association of Georgia and the Georgia School Food Service Association.

Commissioner Irvin continued his commitment to education during his four terms representing Habersham County in the Georgia General Assembly. He served on the House Agriculture, Education, & Appropriations Committees and as the Chairman of both the House Industrial Relations Committee and the Governor's Conference on Education. In addition, he was the Governor's Floor Leader and Executive Secretary to the Governor.

He is the longest serving statewide official in Georgia, having been appointed Commissioner of Agriculture in 1969 by Governor Lester Maddox. Commissioner Irvin is the only Georgian to serve as President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

In addition to serving as the President of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture, he served two terms as the President of the Southern United States Trade Association, an organization which he helped found to promote the export of Southern food and agricultural products.

Commissioner Irvin has received many honors throughout his distinguished career, including the Progressive Farmer Magazine Man-of-the-Year in Service to Agriculture, the National Award for Agricultural Excellence by the National Agri-Marketing Association, the National Future Farmers of America Honorary American Farmer Degree, and the Southeastern Poultry and Egg Association's "Workhorse of the Year" award, which is considered to be the most prestigious recognition bestowed by the poultry industry.

He has been inducted into the Halls of Fame of many organizations, including National 4-H, Georgia Agrirama, Vidalia Onion, Georgia Seed Association, Habersham County, Hall County, and University of Georgia College of Agriculture.

He has received the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine's Distinguished Service Award. He received the Richard B. Russell Public Service Award, the 2005 Jefferson Jackson Day HOPE Award, and most recently received the American Farm Bureau Federation's Distinguished Service Award for his service as an agriculture leader with merit and distinction.

Commissioner Irvin set up an international trade division in his department and pursued markets for Georgia's agricultural producers in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba. His initiative has inspired other states to follow his lead, and the United States Department of Agriculture and leaders in other countries have sought to emulate Georgia's procedures to eradicate animal diseases, and control plant pests.

Madame Speaker, the State of Georgia, especially the agriculture community, and our nation have greatly benefitted from the tremendous leadership of Tommy Irvin. He will be remembered for his ingenuity and dedication. His many awards are well earned and he leaves an unparalleled legacy as he retires.